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THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY
Princeton, New Jersey

School of Historical Studies

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Dear Bill:

You asked only for a general appraisal of the IAC Estimate of November 9 (#32682), copy 26 of which you left with me, but I thought that a series of detailed comments might better express my views on it. If there is any general comment I would have to make, it is that, like so many of our intelligence estimates, it suffers from an excessive rigidity of language and form (WLL: probably unavoidable). It seems to me that the rigid and schematic concept of the questions which ought to be answered in such an estimate forces us to try to compress too much into given compartments, at the risk of artificiality and over-simplification (WLL: Certainly true). But you will see better what I mean if I make my detailed comments, to-wit:

1. Comments on DISCUSSION

a. Page 2, paragraph 5: The discussion of the motives which might underlie a Soviet resort to armed force seems to me to give too little attention to the possibility that war may flow from a whole series of complications in which the Soviet rulers feel their hand forced and see no acceptable alternative than to fight. We are apt to forget their internal political problems and the extent to which they are sensitive to any threat to the stability of their rule (WLL: Yes, agree absolutely).

b. Page 3, last two lines of paragraph 9: This refers to the advantage to the Soviets of "control over the resources of Western Europe and other areas obtained as a result of Soviet conquests in the early stage of the war."

It is my feeling that we greatly over-rate the ability of the Soviet authority to develop with any efficiency or speed the economic resources of a conquered area. Here, we are probably yielding to the temptation to fight the last war instead of the next one, and are identifying the Russians with the Germans. The Russians tend to be as destructive as grasshoppers, and productivity does not exactly spring up at their first military touch (WLL: Good point. This whole matter requires development with reference to Soviet practice in Balkans).

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c. Page 4, paragraph 16, next to last sentence: "When the Soviets have attained this atomic capability, the U.S. superiority in total numbers of atomic bombs will no longer be a deterrent to the Soviet decision for war, in the same relative degree as before."

I would watch this one. It is extremely important, and seems to me to involve some sloppy thinking. The question is whether, if the Soviets feel that war would mean terrible and crippling blows to their own cities and economy, they would take that prospect with greater equanimity if they felt they could inflict comparable or greater damage on the West. From the thesis stated in the paper, one could only conclude that the main concern of the Kremlin was only to make sure that the conflict should not be one-sidedly damaging to the U.S.S.R., but rather mutually suicidal. This ascribes to them motives and attitudes quite different from what I believe to be their real ones. It ignores the strong probability that the Soviet leaders are more concerned to protect what they have than to destroy what they haven't. It over-rates the importance which we enjoy in their eyes, and it falls into the dangerous error of believing that final decisions in the use of mass destruction weapons will rest on the total equation of probable destruction rather than on the limit of what the individual government feels its country can take. We should not forget that there are limits of cost, in terms of destruction within the Soviet Union, beyond which it would not be economical for the Soviet Government to effect any amount of destruction abroad (WLL: On the face of it this makes excellent sense. We must make greater effort to view things from the angle of their interest. Every power must have grave reservations on this score).

d. Page 5, paragraph 25: Here, and at other points in the paper, there is reference to the Soviets "accepting the risk of a general war". This phrase is vague in most of the instances where it is used. Does the word "risks" mean "risks flowing from the events of a general war once one has developed" or does it mean the risk that one may develop? This latter risk already exists. Would it not be better simply to say "to accept a general war"? (WLL: Yes.)

e. On the same page, the entire discussion of this aspect of Soviet intentions seems to me to view a possible war too much as a boxing match, detached from the question of political purposes and consequences (WLL: Right).

f. Page 8, paragraph 39: This envisages only the possibility that a general war might occur as a result of some Soviet action undertaken without deliberate intention to precipitate a general war. I think it ought also to envisage the possibility that it might occur

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as a result of some such action on our part or some other incident flowing from the entire trend of international events and not just from their action (WLL: Again -- we must consider how they view our actions).

g. Page 8, paragraph 40: It seems to me that the use of the word "aggression" and the phrase "policy of aggression", while perhaps morally justified and useful for propaganda purposes, should not have a place in dispassionate estimates of this sort. Whether civil conflict in Korea was properly classified as Soviet "aggression" is something which, it seems to me, need not be argued in this connection. If the Soviet "policy of aggression" means moving Soviet forces across international frontiers in unilateral aggressive actions, without any legal or practical justifications, then probably the invasions of Finland and Eastern Poland in 1939 were the only clear cases. If, on the other hand, it means encouraging Soviet supporters in other countries to rise in insurrection whenever they feel themselves strong enough to seize power, that is a different thing. From that standpoint, I think the use of the term "aggression" is misleading. (WLL: Good old problem about direct and indirect aggression. Might be worth re-examining Soviet stand in 1939 and present "Vishinsky Doctrine".)

h. Page 8, paragraph 41: To my mind, this analysis is quite wrong. See the attached draft of a letter (not sent) to Anne O'Hare McCormick (WLL: Check this).

i. Page 9, paragraphs 45 and following paragraphs: All of this pains me for its lack of historical perspective and for the impression it gives that all of us, including the Soviet rulers, were born yesterday and that today represents some new sort of platform for new decisions and schemes of Soviet policy. It is said that the Soviet rulers "may attempt" to achieve their objectives by two alternative courses, both of which are here outlined. But points a and b of Course One represent only an over-simplification of what has been standard Soviet practice for over thirty years. Why, then, say they "may attempt" to do this? They have attempted, are attempting, and no doubt will continue these attempts. They will continue them as long as they can (WLL: Right).

Again, I object to the wording in point 46 g. As here stated, this can hardly fall into the category of "means short of war". I know of no new places where Soviet armed forces could undertake "local aggression" without running strong risk of launching a new war. Would it not be more correct to say "to undertake local armed action by Soviet forces in circumstances not calculated to lead to war"? (WLL: Agree.)

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j. Page 9, paragraph 47: I have my doubts about the last sentence. If the Kremlin comes to the decision that war is inevitable and decides to begin it at a moment favorable to itself, it will probably rate very highly the factor of general surprise, and may therefore not wish to give us the advance notice of a provocation (WLL: I would suppose that atomic war would almost certainly take the form of surprise attack).

k. Page 11, paragraph 55: This discussion contains a number of implications which bother me. The Soviet leaders do not turn guerrilla activities off and on, like water faucets, in other countries. Most of these activities are intimately connected with local situations which produce and favor them. What Moscow does is to encourage and support, or not encourage and support.

The last sentence of this paragraph seems to me to be meaningless. This all depends on circumstances (WLL: Yes — what does "control the situation" mean?).

l. Page 11, paragraph 56: I find this misleading. Again, we have the implication that life begins today and that one of the courses open to the Kremlin would be to start a wholly new situation, namely guerrilla activities in Greece. The Kremlin leaders have no objection whatsoever to guerrilla activities in Greece as things are at present; and if such activities are not highly developed, it is because the Yugoslavs have withdrawn their support and conditions have been extremely unfavorable, not because Moscow did not make a plan or did not want them to exist. In general, it should be understood that the Kremlin always favors civil war and trouble in other countries where circumstances permit. Whether the Communist Parties are used for civil insurrection is not a question of Kremlin planning (WLL: Partially??); it is a question of the opportunities presented to them by the policies of the respective countries. If the Turks continue to be ruthless and consistent in the destruction of Communist agents, Moscow will not sit down and "plan" indirect aggression in Turkey.

Again, on the Asiatic side, I reiterate: life does not begin today. The Communists are doing everything that they possibly can; for example, in Formosa the ceiling of their activities is provided by the possibilities afforded for such subversive action, not by decisions in Moscow. The same is true of Hongkong.

The paragraph about Germany (no. 57) seems to me to be sound; but the paragraph on Asia (no. 58) again seems to assume a machine-like subordination of the Chinese Communists to Moscow discipline.

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I am not denying Moscow's obvious influence in Peking, but such a view is too pat and over-simplified (WLL: Obviously requires further intelligence and study).

m. Page 14, paragraph 66: About all this, I have the greatest doubt, and cannot imagine we can assert flatly that the Soviet Government would try to do all these things simultaneously. All this reminds me of the joke about "It's your dream, lady". I think it entirely possible that in the event of war the operations of the Red Army may be extremely limited ones in the initial stages, and that the rest may depend in large degree on the course of political developments. All this imputes to the Russians a logistical potential greater than I believe them to have and a pattern of intention which would be plausible only if they, like ourselves, insisted on viewing war as an event in itself detached from political purposes and consequences (WLL: I agree. The whole program as outlined seems to me extravagant).

n. Page 15, paragraph 69: The last sentence on this page seems to me to have no other value than that of a blanket disclaimer for all future responsibility on the part of the CIA. I really find it impossible to believe that the maintenance of such a state of preparation would be a physical possibility for even the most efficient of nations, and the Russians are decidedly not inclined to just this sort of preparedness (WLL: Note this -- I doubt if such a disclaimer was intended. Furthermore, the CIA is not alone involved. I share these doubts).

o. Page 2, Appendix A: I would point out that our obligations to other countries now embrace not only our commitments under written pacts but also the moral commitments we have incurred by the acceptance of international support in Korea; toward the Turks, the British, the Australians and the Canadians, for example, we now have obligations far more serious than treaties of alliance.

p. Page 4, Appendix A, paragraph 18: To my mind this gives an erroneous impression. The basis of the obedience which the Communist leaders can command in Russia, in peace as in war, is fear not enthusiasm. Doctrine is not the mainstay of the regime; intimidation is. This same thought applies to paragraph 19. Of course the vast majority would acquiesce in the decision of the Kremlin, as long as the alternative is death or the concentration camp. But this should be distinguished from the state of mind in which they would go to war.

q. Page 4, Appendix A, paragraph 20: I find this discussion inadequate. Bear in mind that now a great portion (WLL: How great?) of the Soviet citizens would be happy if this regime could be replaced with another one. While they would not show this by their words or behavior, they would wish, in time of war, that the war might result in the overthrow of the regime. But their attitude would be extensively affected by the way in which we conducted the war and by the skillfulness of our political approach to them (WLL: Can this be true of large numbers?).

r. Page 4, Appendix A, paragraph 21: I hope that this may not be taken to mean that rebellion is regarded as possible only among the national minorities. The feelings of the Great Russian people are little, if any, less bitter and they should not be ignored (WLL: Would be interesting to have the evidence on this.).

s. Appendix B: Several of the above comments apply to this appendix as well.

The statements in paragraph 19 (page B-5) about the possibility of satellite forces over-running Yugoslavia again reflects a tendency to treat the satellites as bloodless pawns of the Kremlin and to assume that military factors are the only criteria governing the determination of Moscow's policies (WLL: And there is further question whether militarily Yugoslavia could withstand combined satellite attack). In examining the desirability of using the satellites against Yugoslavia, the Kremlin would have to take into account a host of delicate political questions, such as future territorial settlements, effects on the political stability of the other Balkan satellites, nature of the regime to replace Tito in Yugoslavia, etc. These questions are not by any means as easy as they sound. They are the ones Moscow will think about—not just about who might win the military encounter. Our stubborn insistence on viewing military action outside of its political context—as though nothing mattered but the military result—is a dangerous act of self delusion (WLL: Again, let us think more of how the Soviets view the situation).

t. Page B-6, paragraph 23: To read this paragraph, you would think that Communist guerrilla operations in Greece would represent an unheard of situation we had never faced before. Why should such operations be a greater problem to us, now that stability and confidence and economic life have been restored, than they were in the dark days of 1947?

u. Page B-7, paragraph 25: "Communism has little appeal to the Turks..."; this is not the point, or not the way to put it. What is important there is not a question of popular "appeal"; what is important

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is that governmental policy in Turkey makes that country relatively resistant to internal Communist pressures. Again, when you say the Soviet Union "could exert" pressure on the Turks by fostering the movement for Kurdish autonomy, why give the impression that life begins today and that the Kurds represent a faucet handle the Russians might decide to turn? (WLL: I subscribe wholeheartedly to this criticism.) The Kurdish autonomy movement has been going on for decades. The Russians have made, and will continue to make, exactly as much political profit from it as circumstances permit; why imply that there are some new potentialities which they have never exploited up to this time but might for some reason now decide to exploit?

Similarly, in paragraph 26 (page B-7), why should the Russians at this time undertake an "intensification" of propaganda and attempts at sabotage? Their aspirations with respect to Turkey are not new. Does anyone really think that they have been restraining themselves or soft pedalling these activities in the past for some reason of delicacy? Again, the ceiling of what they do is the limit of what they can get away with.

Again, in the case of the Near Eastern states one might think from the wording of this that the Politburo had sprung into existence on--say--July 1, 1950 and was now sitting down to draft a program of world domination from scratch (WLL: Much of this can be corrected by changing the tense of the verb).

v. Page B-15, paragraphs 62 and 63: This seems to me to be very skimpy and over-simplified treatment of an extremely important problem. It ignores entirely the relation of Soviet action to external factors (see my draft letter to Mrs. McCormick, attached).

w. Page B-16, paragraph 65: This discussion is inadequate. There is no "the Japanese Communist Party". There are two parties--one loyal to the Cominform, the other to Mao. The ability of the Japanese Government to cope with them depends on what we decide to give it in the way of an internal police establishment, plus several other factors. I think we should not be too smug about the situation in Japan, especially until we see the psychological results of the peace treaty operation and the subsequent retention of a U.S. military establishment there.

/s/ George F. Kennan

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